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ABSTRACT

This study examined preservice teachers' expectations of their field experiences and how those expectations were met. The study population included primarily college sophomores who were either elementary or secondary education majors at a medium-sized university. An expectation checklist was given to 110 students prior to the field experience at the first seminar meeting of a required course for sophomore level participation (108 responses were usable). The Post-Experience Checklist was given to 85 students from the initial population 8 weeks later after students had participated for 40 hours in an elementary or secondary classroom (81 responses were useable). In addition 15 students (12 females and 3 males) volunteered to be interviewed. Results indicated that students held high expectations for early field experience and that those expectations were moderately met. Age, reason for wanting to become a teacher, and prior experience with children were found to be significant variables in the level of expectations and the degree to which expectations were met. Nontraditional students tended to have lower expectations of the field experience and their expectations were better met than those of traditional students. Interview results showed that interaction with the children and the cooperating teacher were the reasons why their expectations were met. (Contains 16 references.) (JB)

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Early Field Experience: How Well Are Students' Expectations Met?

Alexandria J. Rekkas

A current focus of research in teacher education involves an analysis of teachers' and student teachers' personal practical knowledge and the role of classroom knowledge in their preparation (Carter, 1990; Doyle, 1990; and Carter & Gonzalez, 1993). The practical knowledge and experience that takes place in teacher education programs in the classroom is being investigated as an important component in the preparation of future teachers.

Although there is an abundance of research on the student teaching experience, there is very little research on the practical knowledge students gain from their experience in the classroom prior to student teaching. Requiring early field experience in the teacher education program prior to student teaching has become the practice for most institutions across the nation. Because early field experience requirements are so wide-spread, it is important to evaluate the experience to determine how it affects preservice teachers.

Applegate and Lasley (1983) recommend that institutions determine the students' expectations of early field experience so

necessary or can change the early field experience to match students' expectations. When expectations of field experiences are met, prospective teachers will likely experience a sense of satisfaction. When expectations are not met, students will likely experience frustration.

What do students expect from early field experience and how well are those expectations met? The purpose of this study was to answer these questions.

Review of Related Literature

The limited research that has been conducted on early field experience has yielded mixed results as to whether the experience has assisted preservice teachers in becoming better teachers. Several studies comparing student teachers with and without early field experience have not shown significant differences between the two groups. (Grossman, 1980; Henry, 1983; Moody, 1982). However, Scherer (1977) found that student teachers with early field experience had a higher self-concept than student teachers who had not had early field experience. A study by Foley (1977) indicated that student teachers who had an early field experience had a higher

perceived confidence and value of teaching tasks than student teachers who did not have an early field experience. King and Martin (1981) found that when beginning student teaching, students had less anxiety if they had more previous experience with children.

Students' perceptions of early field experience tend to be positive. Students report that they have acquired a "feel" for the classroom, gained a positive attitude, developed rapport with learners, and enjoyed the experience (Martin & Wood, 1983; Seccuro & Owen, 1982). Students in early field experience perceive that the experience is very useful in developing skills and confidence (Anderson & Graebell, 1990).

The setting of the early field experience may assist students in developing skills in working with a diverse population. Heineman (1992) reported that early field experience in urban schools helps diminish stereotypes and fears of working with a diverse population of children. Gipe (1989) found that immersion in a setting of diverse experiences improved attitudes of prospective teachers.

A few negative aspects of students' perceptions toward early field experience were identified: students did not know the purposes

and goals of the early field experience program (Seccuro & Owen, 1982) and the university lacked knowledge of what the students had done and ought to do in an early field experience ((Martin & Wood, 1983). Overall, however, students perceive early field experience as a positive experience.

Education students hold high expectations for early field experience. Applegate and Lasley (1983) developed a checklist of students' expectations of early field experience and administered the instrument to education students. The results indicated that students hold high expectations for the field experience and expect to learn about the teaching profession and about themselves as a teacher.

Purpose

In light of the limited research on early field experience and the recommendations by Applegate and Lasley (1983) to evaluate students' expectations of early field experience, this study was conducted in order to determine students' expectations and how well they are met in an early field experience. This study was also

intended to identify contributing factors as to why students' expectations were or were not met.

Method

The data collected for this study included information gathered during a spring quarter from students enrolled in an early field experience course at a medium sized-university in the west. The majority of students were sophomores, 20 years old, and were either secondary or elementary education majors.

The instruments used in this study were modified based on the expectation questionnaire developed by Applegate and Lasley (1983). An Expectation Checklist was given prior to the field experience at the first seminar meeting of a required course for sophomore level participation. Initially, 110 students took the Expectation Checklist questionnaire (108 were useable).

The questions on the checklist were divided into six categories as a result of factor analysis conducted by Applegate and Lasley (1983). The six categories in the checklist are as follows:

1. Expectations for Assessing the Complexities of Teaching. (e.g. I expect to learn the rules and policies of the school.)

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2. Expectations for Modeling Professional Practice. (e.g. I expect to gain confidence in myself as a teacher).

3. Expectations for Acquiring Practical Insights and Ideas. (e.g. I expect to learn how to evaluate children's work).

4. Expectations for Practicing Teaching Skills. (e.g. I expect the chance to teach the whole class).

5. Expectations for Understanding Various School and Classroom Settings. (e.g. I expect to find out which grade level I will be best at teaching).

6. Expectations for Dealing Directly with Students. (e.g. I expect the chance to work with students in a small group).

The Post Experience Checklist was given to 85 students from the initial population at the course's last seminar meeting eight weeks later after students had participated for 40 hours in an elementary or secondary classroom (81 were useable).

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to compare all the individual students' responses on the Expectation Checklist and the Post Experience Checklist in order to obtain an overall comparison of expectations and how they were met for the population.

A six-way repeated measures MANOVA at the .05 level of significance was used to analyze the effect of the independent variables of age, gender, prior experience with children, reasons

why students are interested in teaching, and grade level of their experience on the combined dependent variables of overall score and the six subscores (categories) on the Checklist. ANOVA was utilized at the .05 level of significance to analyze each of the six categories and the total, separately, not in a combined form.

All of the 81 subjects who took the Pre and Post Checklist were given the opportunity to volunteer to be interviewed. The purpose of the interview was to gather data to determine why expectations were or were not met. Of the 81 subjects, 15 students volunteered to be interviewed. Twelve of the 15 subjects interviewed were female and three were male. Their ages ranged from 18-51 with a mean age of 25 and a mode of 20. Five students participated at the elementary school level and 10 participated at the secondary level. A 15-20 minute structured interview was conducted with each student utilizing eight open-ended questions on the interview schedule. Examples of the questions include, Can you recall what things influenced you to have the expectations you did before the field experience in EDFE 270? Were your expectations of the field experience met? Do you think your expectations were

realistic? The responses were analyzed according to similarities which emerged, frequency of responses were tallied, and responses were reported descriptively.

Results and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that students hold high expectations for early field experience and that those expectations are moderately met. Overall, students' expectations were at the upper range of "moderately met" as indicated by the correlation coefficient of .66. The frequency tally of the responses on Question 66, "Overall, my expectations were met", of the Post Experience Checklist also supports this finding. Of the students who responded, 93% indicated strongly agree or agree in their response to this question (See Table 1).

Table 1

Frequency of Responses to Question 66: Overall Expectations Were Met

SA	A	U	D	SD
43	32	3	3	0
53.1%	39.5%	3.7%	3.7%	0%

Students' expectations are high which was suggested by Applegate and Lasley (1983). What is further augmented due to this study, is that students' expectations of early field experience are moderately met. Students indicated that they enjoyed the experience which coincides with research on students' positive perception of early field experience (Seccuro & Owen, 1982; Martin & Wood, 1983).

Moderate correlations were found between students' expectations and how well they were met in all six of the categories ranging from .48 to .57 . A scatterplot of the data indicated that expectations for Category Six (Expectations for Dealing Directly with Students) were exceeded. Expectations for Category Three (Expectations for Acquiring Practical Insights and Idea) had the highest correlation with the Post Experience Checklist with a correlation coefficient of .57, which indicates that there was a good match between expectations and how well they were met.

Variables Related to Students' Expectations

There was a significant difference in students' expectations due to the variable of age when MANOVA was utilized to compare the means of students' expectations (See Table 2).

Table 2

MANOVA of Main Effects on Expectation Checklist

Source	F (7,53)	Prob F
Age	2.98	.0079*
Gender	0.57	.7795
Grade	1.31	.2586
Experience	1.97	.0692
Reason	1.87	.0865

*p <.05

The results of this study seem to substantiate a previous study conducted by Donofrio, Van Cleaf, and Martin (1980) who found that older students with more prior experience with children thought that methods were more important than field experience. Older students may think that the field experience is not as

important as courses and therefore they do not expect as much from the field experience as younger students do.

When the total checklist and categories were analyzed separately with ANOVA, the variable of reason for interest in becoming a teacher was a significant factor in the total mean score of the Expectation Checklist. Age, reason for their interest in teaching, and experience were significant variables in at least two of the six categories. When the means of the different age groups were compared, nontraditional students (ages 23+) had lower expectations than traditional students (ages 18-22), while nontraditional students' expectations were better met. Students who chose "desire to work with young people" as the reason behind their interest in becoming a teacher had higher expectations than students who chose another reason for their interest in becoming a teacher, such as "interest in subject-matter" or "influence of a teacher in elementary or secondary school".

Variables Related to How Well Expectations Were Met

There were significant mean differences due to the variables of experience, age, and reason for interest in teaching as related to

the degree to which students' expectations were met. However, the variable of grade level was not found to be a significant main effect.

Prior experience with children was a significant variable in determining the degree to which students' expectations were met when the overall total mean score and the category mean scores were analyzed with MANOVA (See Table 3).

Table 3

MANOVA of Main Effects on Difference Between Pre and Post Checklists

Source	F (7,53)	Prob F
Age	1.18	.3284
Gender	0.89	.5245
Grade	1.65	.1427
Experience	3.25	.0061*
Reason	1.26	.2894

*p <.05

As indicated by the comparison of mean score differences, students with more prior experience with children had their expectations better met than students who had less prior experience with children. The difference of prior experience with children was

also found by King and Martin (1981) whose study showed that student teachers with more prior experience with children had less anxiety than student teachers who had less experience with children.

When results were analyzed with ANOVA on the overall checklist, there were significant differences in how well expectations were met due to age and prior experience. Older students' expectations were exceeded while traditional-aged students did not have expectations met, according to the mean score differences. Students with more prior experience with children had expectations better met than students with less prior experience with children.

Using ANOVA, there were some significant differences in categories due to age, prior experience with children, and reason for their interest in teaching. Nontraditional students had expectations exceeded, according to the mean score differences in Category Two (Expectations for Modeling Professional Practice) and Category Four (Expectations for Practicing Teaching Skills). Students with more prior experience with children had expectations exceeded in Category Four (Expectations for Practicing Teaching Skills). Perhaps

teachers allowed the students more opportunities to teach based on their previous experience. Students who chose "desire to work with young people" as their reason for interest in teaching, did not have expectations met in Category Four (Expectations for Practicing Teaching Skills) as well as students who chose another reason for interest in teaching. It is possible that these students held more ideal expectations and were not allowed to teach as much as they expected.

Interview Results

Ten of the 15 students who were interviewed stated that their expectations were met or more than met. The cooperating teacher and interaction with the pupils were the main reasons why their expectations were met. Some examples of responses as to why expectations were met were: the teacher gave them the freedom and responsiblity to work with pupils; the teacher helped them gradually work from one-on-one with pupils to a small group situation; the teacher was helpful and gave students suggestions for lesson plans; the teacher made them feel welcome; and they were able to interact

with the children. An example of a statement made by a student who indicated that expectations were more than met is as follows:

> The experience extended beyond my expectations. I gained a lot of experience and knowledge in classroom teaching. The teacher helped, gave suggestions, expected me to do things on my own because of my prior experience.

Five of the students who were interviewed responded that their expectations were not met or were partially unmet. These five students reported that the reason was due to their own fault, lack of interaction with the pupils, or lack of time in the classroom. Some examples of comments from students whose expectations were not met follows:

> I thought I'd have more hands-on but it was more observance. I was an outsider, I didn't develop a relationship with the students [pupils] early in the year. They were already set in a routine. I would have liked to come in the beginning of the year.

> I learned what is expected of a teacher: grading, planning, watching someone else teach. I would have liked more interaction with students [pupils]. I sat in the back of the room bored. Needed more time in class. My schedule didn't fit with the teacher's.

Other students' comments in the interviews indicated that previous experiences with pupils were influential in students' expectations for this early field experience. Students also reported that they felt their expectations were realistic either because they had an open mind or because their expectations were met. Several students commented in the interview that communication is lacking between the university and the students. Student recommendations focused on the need for better scheduling, better organization of the course, clearer information regarding the course and field experience, and better communication with the cooperating teacher. Students in this course did not have a university supervisor, which could account for the lack of communication between the university and the cooperating teacher. Two other studies have indicated the lack of communication as well (Seccuro & Owen, 1982; Martin & Wood, 1983).

It appears that including practice along with theory, as represented by the field experience and seminar course, assists students to perceive the value of theory as well as to gain practical application of the theory. For example, students commented that the

seminar in classroom management assisted them in observing classroom management techniques of cooperating teachers in the classroom. Students' responses suggest that there are more benefits to them if theory and practice are learned simultaneously. They can see the relationship between theory and practice.

Summary

As indicated by the questionnaires in this study of sophomore education students, students have high expectations for early field experience and their expectations are moderately met.

Age, reason for wanting to become a teacher, and prior experience with children were found to be significant variables in the level of expectations and the degree to which expectations are met. Grade level was not found to be significant.

Nontraditional students tended to have lower expectations of the field experience and their expectations were better met than traditional students.

Students who chose "desire to work with young people" as the reason for their interest in becoming a teacher, did not have their

expectations met as well as students who chose another reason.

Interview results of a sample of 15 students revealed that interaction with the children and the cooperating teacher were the reasons why their expectations were met. Students whose expectations were not met felt that not being able to interact with the children, and having unrealistic expectations were why not all their expectations were met.

Recommendations

In order to bridge the gap in expectations between students of differing ages and prior field experiences with children, all students need to be told more directly what to expect of the early field experience. If all students are given more information on what to expect, then it is likely that students' expectations will become more similar. That is, younger students' expectations will become lower or more realistic, and older students' expectations will become higher. However, students' field experiences are varied depending on the school and the teacher, so it is difficult to tell students exactly what to expect. One solution would be to have a

more structured and uniform experience for students in early field experience.

Based on the small sample of students who were interviewed, there appears to be a need to select cooperating teachers carefully because the teacher is very influential in assisting students in meeting their expectations. Students also indicated that they want the opportunity to work directly with pupils. Cooperating teachers should allow students the freedom and responsibility to work with pupils whenever possible. More interaction with pupils can be accomplished through tutorials and small group interaction.

Communication needs to be enhanced between the teachers, students, and the university. Students who were interviewed expressed frustration at the lack of information regarding the course and field experience and the lack of a sense of direction from the university. If a university supervisor is not provided to assist in communication, hand-outs to the teacher or an inservice meeting may be another way to communicate with the cooperating teachers. Furthermore, the teacher and the students need to communicate to determine what each expects to gain from the experience.

In conclusion, this study shed some light on students' expectations and how well they are met in an early field experience. Students' expectations are high and are moderately met. The cooperating teacher and interaction with pupils are keys to expectations being met. If early and continuous field experience continues to be the trend in teacher education, it is important for institutions to provide clear communication and expectations to students. There is also a need to carefully select cooperating teachers and provide students experiences to interact with pupils so that preservice teachers' expectations may be better met and so that they may have a rewarding experience.

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